Forum

A Short Journey Through the Unknown Life of Leadership Studies

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THIS ISSUE OF RIVISTA INTERNAZIONALE DI FILOSOFIA E PSICOLOGIA will offer a section on Leadership Studies which presents a selection of studies by some of the most authoritative scholars in the field. Its aim is to offer material for a reflection in a discipline that has been often restricted into the field of Organization Studies but on the contrary provides challenging interdisciplinary connections. I first provide a very short and incomplete survey of the discipline by highlighting the most important contributions in the field. The aim of this introduction is to provide a sort of compass for the reader who is not familiar with leadership studies before introducing in detail the contributions to this special section.

Leadership Studies is a relatively new discipline that is growing at a fast rate around the world. It stems from disciplines revolving around Organization Sciences despite its philosophical roots; Plato's *Republic*, Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, Sun Tzu's *Art of War*, and Machiavelli's *The Prince* are usually recognized as the bedrocks of this discipline. Leadership set to become central academic field in the future for a variety of reasons. The increasing impact of private organizations in the economicl and cultural fabric of the world; organizations are indeed playing a leading role in the process of globalization. Organizations need leaders able to guide them through diverse challenges, such as cross-cultural management, crisis management, and so on. Moreover, as will be better explained in this introduction, normative issues are becoming more and more fundamental for defining the expected personal characteristics exhibited by a leader. Recent business scandals have shown how the ethical conduct of organizations (private or public) has become a central concern.[1] Political leadership is another important topic Leadership Studies investigates; growing acknowledgement of the importance of ethics in this area alone could already explain why this discipline is becoming so fundamental relevance not only from a theoretical but especially from a practical perspective.

Finally, from a meta-theoretical level, Leadership Studies, more than other disciplines, is emerging as a deeply multidisciplinary field; for this reason, it is likely to pioneer the way in which future academic interests will be shaped.

As an academic area of inquiry, the study of leadership has been of interest to scholars from a wide variety of disciplinary backgrounds. Today, Leadership Studies, has become one of the fastest growing academic fields in higher education being studied within some of the more established and traditional

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academic disciplines such as engineering, education, and medicine. Most of these academic programs have been designed to be multidisciplinary in nature-drawing upon theories and applications from related fields such as sociology, psychology, history, philosophy, and management.

There is no established definition of Leadership; studies have demonstrated no agreement about its definition leading to what is referred as "the definition problem" in Leadership Studies.[2] However, management guru Peter Drucker, proposed a definition which is called the "minimal definition of leadership"[3] that famously states «The only definition of a leader is someone who has followers».[4] Therefore, Leadership is understood as a discipline in which the fundamental elements are: the organization, (at least) a leader and followers.

The first garden

It is possible to group Leadership Studies in three main categories, each related to a dominant disciplinary paradigm: Leadership as personality, leadership as behavior and action, and leadership as a symbol.[5] Trait theories were the leading paradigm of the first category. In its earliest form this theory provided an easy explanation for the complex set of individual characteristics that together form a leader.[6] The origins of Trait theories are found in several classics such as *The Odyssey* and *Iliad* and the so-called Great Man Theory started with Thomas Carlyle[7] and Ralph Waldo Emerson.[8] Reemergence of the Trait Theory in more recent times (1940) were conducted by several authors in the United States.[9] Trait Theory was further developed during the 80s showing that while no set of traits could guarantee an individual's raise to leadership in any given situation, the possession of certain traits make it more likely that a person will be granted or assigned a leadership position. These characteristics have much in common with the qualities previously associated with great men in Great Men theories

such as physical features, personality factors, education and skills. However, exactly which of these characteristics a leader should possess is something that is considered to change continuously across time and seems related more to how a leader is perceived by his/her followers rather than to his or her real characteristics. Trait theories have started debates on some "philosophical-like que-stions" about leadership, such as whether leaders are made or born (which is related to leadership characteristics) and about the nature of charisma, raising what eventually became perennial questions in the field.

Send one your leadership

Leadership as behavior and action is linked to leadership style theories which are concerned with the behavior or behavioral patterns of leaders. These theories are very popular[10] and often go beyond a description of the behavioral pattern of leaders to offer explanations for the cause of leadership styles and their consequences in terms of effectiveness.[11] Starting in 1945, the Ohio State University Leadership Studies of Leadership Behaviors sought to identify the observable behaviors of leaders instead of identifying personality traits. Using data collected by interviews, observation and questionnaires; the results showed that two factors accounted for most of the variance. These two factors were labeled Consideration and Initiating Structure. The first reflects the extent to which a leader exhibits concern for the welfare of the members of the group. This factor is oriented towards interpersonal relationships, mutual trust and friendship. This leadership style is people-oriented. The latter reflects the extent to which an individual is likely to define and structure her role and those of her subordinates toward goals attainment. This leadership style is task-oriented.[12] These are the extremes between which the behavior of managers ranges; indeed, managers are neither just task-oriented nor just people-oriented.

Several questionnaires and instruments for

measuring leadership qualities followed the original Ohio State University Leadership Studies of Leadership Behaviors research and led to two different and opposed views of the relationship between leadership and effectiveness: R.R. Blake and J.S. Mouton (creators of the famous *Managerial Grid*) have claimed that there is just one best leadership style – team management –[13] while F. Fiedler claimed that leadership behavior must be adjusted to a given situation to create organizational effectiveness (Contingency Model).[14] While contingency theories have been a valuable in understanding leadership behaviors, there has been criticism of the approach including its limited conceptualization of leadership and insufficient empirical support for its models, a failure to distinguish between the behavior of managers and leaders behaviors, and over-simplification of the options available to leaders and the situations leaders might face.[15] This standpoint gave rise to further disciplinary research programmes; notably the path-goal theory[16] and leader-follower exchange[17] theories.

Same old methodological problems

Leadership in this context is seen as the way in which leaders or their actions are perceived by followers. Two streams are linked to this research programme: transformational, transforming and transactional theories and the leadership ethics approach.

James MacGregor Burns in his seminal book *Leadership*[18] started this research programme by proposing a normative conception of Leadership, which he calls transforming leadership. Transforming leadership is normative in the sense that it does not intend to simply describe how leaders in fact behave but, rather, prescribes how they ought to behave. This proposal far from being trivial in Leadership Studies, revealed a philosophical or methodological puzzle that had passed unnoticed through the discipline's earlier history; past leadership scholars were indeed ambiguous regarding whether they were

proposing a descriptive or a normative theory of leadership. This ambiguity led to a number of internal contradictions in much the same way as ambiguities between question of ethics and law in normative reasoning lead to ethical and legal fallacies. D. Hume famously warned about passing from *is* statements to *ought* statements (later labeled the Is-Ought Fallacy);[19] almost every major contribution to leadership studies indeed move quickly from analyzing what leadership is to asserting a model of how it gets done, and thence to prescriptions for what leaders *should* do, and all too often these kinds of studies start at the end, with value laden notions of what *ought* to be the case.[20]

According to Burns, transforming leadership aims at moving beyond people's wants and wishes, thereby engaging their real needs and values. Burns argues that transforming leadership is the capacity to transcend the claims of the multiplicity of everyday wants, needs and expectations by raising both leaders and followers «to higher levels of motivation and morality».[21] Burns contrasted transforming leadership to the more common, transactional varieties of leadership characterized in terms of the notion of exchange which could be economic, political or psychological. According to Price, the morality associated with transactional leadership is thus an ethics of choice and individualism that characterizes the market and contemporary politics.[22]

Bernard M. Bass further elaborated on Burn's dichotomy between transforming and transactional leadership arguing that they are not on two opposite ends of the spectrum but are separate concepts. According to Bass, the best leaders are indeed both transformational and transactional. Finally transactional and leader-follower exchange theories are commonly understood as a step beyond the dominant "leader-oriented" approaches which focus on the leader's actions and attitudes. Such theories while they not focus on the normative-ethical elements of leadership, and in spite of their behaviorist assumptions have the advantage of shifting the meaning

of leadership from the unique role of leaders to a holistic vision of leader-followers interaction although they limit such interaction to that of "rational agents" ignoring complex emotional factors and social values.[23]

Finally leadership ethics emerged as a distinct area of applied ethics and leadership studies in mid 90s. It is not strictly speaking an area of professional ethics since leaders face additional challenges because their work is not professionally regulated as is the job of an engineer or a lawyer. In particular ethical leadership studies are concerned with the relation between ethical behavior and effecttiveness in leadership as it seems that leaders cannot always be at the same times ethical and effective.[24] According to pioneer leadership ethical scholar Joanne Ciulla, ethical leadership is based on a leader-follower relation that consists of an ongoing dialogue about values. The quality of all aspects of leadership rest on how well leaders promote the end values of liberty, justice, equality and happiness. These are lofty moral standards, but the relationship between what leaders are and what they should be is the main point of studying leadership.[25]

Outside this introduction

In this section we offer a selection of three papers. These papers address different leadership topics yet focusing on the multidisciplinary nature of Leadership Studies. Indeed the authors included in this section will debate a topic dealing with psychology and morality, ethics and organization studies, literature and the emerging field of transhumanist studies.

The first paper is written by the most eminent leadership ethics scholar, Joanne Ciulla, a founding faculty member of the Jepson School of Leadership, the leading world institution in Leadership Studies. Ciulla, argues that it is reasonable to make attributions about a leader's character based on minor incidents such as kicking a dog. Her paper begins with a short review of the relevant literature from leadership studies and social psychology on how our prototypes of leaders affect the attributions we make about them. Then the paper examines the role of virtues, habits, and dispositional statements to show why a minor action such as kicking a dog can offer – through the lens of semiotics – fundamental insight into a leader's moral character.

Alan Preti, Director of the Institute for Ethical Leadership and Social Responsibility at Rosemont College, Pennsylvania, addresses a more practical topic. Preti claims that moral imagination is often viewed as a necessary condition for ethical leadership on account of its role in managerial decision-making and organizational management. Preti, throughout the article argues that an extension of "moral imagination" beyond this limited context can shed light on recent reconceptualizations of the nature of business and the relationship between business and society proffered by several well-known business leaders. Preti, finally, suggests that an account of moral imagination which takes into consideration its contribution to the development of a morally deeper and broader perspective and its bearing on character is of particular value for business leaders.

Jana Vizmuller-Zocco, Associate Professor in Senior Scholar at the Italian Studies, Department of Languages, Literatures and Linguistics, York University in her contribution *Science Fiction and Ontologies of Leadership*, aims at to answering to the following question: What happens to (the nature of) leadership in a technologically-driven society? Four novels form the backbone of the description of futuristic leadership. The four conclusions drawn from this analysis regarding the nature of leadership in a technologically-driven society point to the need for leadership studies to pay much greater attention to the impact of technological advances and the philosophical implications of transhumanism. The impact of nano-biotechnology affects the role of leaders, followers, goals, directions, alignment and

commitment and also has ontological reper-
cussions for the way in which (augmented and
unaugmented) humans will deal with each
other. If early augmented humans/cyborgs
and any other sentient beings are in fact
comparable to Giambattista Vico's brutes, and
if his *corsi e ricorsi* (ebbs and flows) of human
history can be applied to to the history of non-
human, sentient beings' history, then the work
is cut out for all disciplines, but especially for
those which deal with ontologies of
leadership.

▌ Notes

[1] However, the emergence of such problems is not
new: tracks of a initial discussion on these themes
can be found, for instance, in B. RUSSELL, *The Pro-
spects of Industrial Civilization*, in collaboration
with Dora Russell, George Allen & Unwin, Lon-
don 1923.

[2] A. MARTURANO, J.T. WREN, M. HARVEY, *The
Making of Leadership and the Humanities*, in:
«Leadership and the Humanities», vol. I, n. 1,
2013, pp. 1-5.

[3] A. MARTURANO, *Understanding Leadership: Is It
time for a Linguistic Turn?*, in: J. CIULLA (ed.),
Leadership at the Crossroads, vol. III, Praeger,
Westport (CT) 2008, pp. 117-131.

[4] P. DRUCKER, *Managing Oneself*, in: «Harvard Bu-
siness Review», vol. LXXVII, n. 2, 1999, pp. 65-74.

[5] J.A. ANDERSEN, *Leadership and Leadership Re-
search*, in: D.F. DAHIYA (ed.), *Current Issues in
Business Disciplines*, vol. V, *Management II*, Spell-
bound Publications, New Delhi 2000, pp. 2267-
2287.

[6] K.J. LEVINE, *Trait Theory*, in: A. MARTURANO, J.
GOSLING (eds.), *Leadership. The Key Concepts*,
Routledge, London 2008, pp. 163-166.

[7] See T. CARLYLE, *Thomas Carlyle on Heroes and
Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History*, AMS
Press, New York 1969.

[8] See R.W. EMERSON, *Representative Men. Seven
Lectures*, Belknap Press, Cambridge (MA) 1996.

[9] C. BIRD, *Social Psychology*, Appleton-Century,
New York 1940; R.M. STODGILL, *Personal Factors
Associated with Leadership: A Survey of the Litera-
ture*, in: «Journal of Psychology», vol. XXV, n. 1,
1948, pp. 35-71; R.D. MANN, *A Review of the Rela-
tionship Between Personality and Performance in
Small Groups*, in: «Psychological Bulletin», vol.

LVI, n. 4, 1959, pp. 241-270.

[10] M.W. MCCALL, *Leadership Research: Choosing
Gods and Devils on the Run*, in: «Journal of Oc-
cupational Psychology», vol. XLIX, n. 3, 1976,
pp. 139-153.

[11] B.M. BASS, *Bass & Stodgill's Handbook of Lead-
ership: Theory, Research, and Managerial Applica-
tions*, 3rd ed., The Free Press, New York 1990.

[12] E.A. FLEISHMAN, E.F. HARRIS, *Patterns of Lead-
ership Behavior Related to Employee Grievances
and Turnover*, in: «Presonnel Psychology», vol.
XV, n. 2, 1962, pp. 43-56

[13] R.R. BLAKE, J.S. MOUTON, *The Managerial
Grid*, Gulf, Houston (TX) 1964.

[14] F.E. FIEDLER, *A Theory of Leadership Effective-
ness*, McGraw-Hill, New York 1967.

[15] L. BOLMAN, T. DEAL, *Reframing Organizations:
Artistry, Choice, and Leadership*, Jossey-Bass, San
Francisco (CA) 1991.

[16] The path-goal theory, also known as the path-
goal theory of leader effectiveness or the path-
goal model states that a leader's behavior is con-
tingent on the satisfaction, motivation and per-
formance of her or his subordinates. It also argues
that the leader engages in behaviors that com-
plement the subordinate's abilities and compen-
sate for deficiencies. R.J. HOUSE, *A Path-Goal
Theory of Leadership Effectiveness*, in: «Admin-
istration Science Quarterly», September, 1971,
pp. 32-39.

[17] The leader-member exchange, or LMX theory
of leadership focuses on the two-way relationship
(dyadic relationships) between supervisors and
subordinates. The theory assumes that leaders
develop an exchange with each of their subordi-
nates, and that the quality of these leader-member
exchange relationships influences subordinates'
responsibility, decisions influence, access to re-
sources and performance. This theory aims at
promoting positive employment experiences and
also augmenting organizational effectiveness. Fi-
nally, the leader-member exchange theory focuses
on increasing organizational success by creating
positive relations between leaders and subordi-
nates. G.B. GRAEN, M. UHL-BIEN, *The Relation-
ship-based Approach to Leadership: Development of
LMX Theory of Leadership over 25 Years: Applying
a Multi-level, Multi-domain Perspective*, in: «Lead-
ership Quarterly», vol. VI, n. 2, 1995, pp. 219-247.

[18] J.M. BURNS, *Leadership*, Harper & Row, New
York 1978.

[19] See D. HUME, D.F. NORTON, M.J. NORTON

(eds.), *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739), Oxford University Press, Oxford 2000.

[20] J. GOSLING, A. MARTURANO, *Introduction*, in: A. MARTURANO, J. GOSLING (eds.), *Leadership The Key Concepts*, cit., pp. xxiii-xxvi.

[21] J.M. BURNS, *Leadership*, cit., p. 20.

[22] T. PRICE, *Transformational Leadership*, in: A. MARTURANO, J. GOSLING (eds.), *Leadership. The Key Concepts*, cit., pp. 170-174.

[23] M. TAVANTI, *Transactional Leadership*, in: A. MARTURANO, J. GOSLING (eds.), *Leadership. The Key Concepts*, cit., pp. 166-170.

[24] J. CIULLA, *Ethics*, in: A. MARTURANO, J. GOSLING (eds.), *Leadership. The Key Concepts*, cit., pp. 58-62.

[25] *Ibidem.*